
TABLE OF CONTENTS

A COMPREHENSIVE GENERAL PLAN I-1

A BEAUTIFUL DESERT CONTEXT..... I-1

A VISION FOR THE CITY OF RANCHO MIRAGE I-2

USING THE GENERAL PLAN I-3

 General Plan Format I-3

 Implementation of the General Plan..... I-4

 Consistency with the General Plan I-6

AMENDING THE GENERAL PLAN I-6

GOALS, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS I-7



INTRODUCTION

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The City of Rancho Mirage is a well-known desert resort and residential community in the Coachella Valley. With major regional medical facilities, the Valley’s most vibrant and attractive commercial centers, and world-class resort hotels, Rancho Mirage is a desirable destination for residents and visitors alike. Guided by the General Plan, Rancho Mirage is positioned to reach its full potential by developing new commercial centers at strategic locations, providing new housing opportunities, continuing the beautification of its roadways, and providing more design guidance for public and private realms.

This introductory chapter provides a broad overview of the General Plan—its creation, its contents and its use. To provide a context for better understanding it, this section briefly summarizes the City’s evolution, setting, and Vision, as well as direction on how to interpret, implement, and amend the General Plan. This section concludes with a goal, policies, and programs to guide the City in administering and implementing the General Plan.

A COMPREHENSIVE GENERAL PLAN

All cities are required by the California Government Code to prepare comprehensive, long-term general plans, to direct development of the community. The General Plan provides the goals, policies, programs and implementation strategies to guide the development of Rancho Mirage and to protect and enhance its valued assets and resources. In addition to goals and policies, the General Plan includes background information and discussion, diagrams, maps, tables and charts that provide direction for the prudent and conscientious management of future development.

The City’s previous General Plan was last comprehensively updated in 1997. To adjust to and plan for the rapidly changing conditions of the Coachella Valley, the City Council determined that a comprehensive update to the General Plan was necessary and, in July 2003, approved a process for the review and updating of the General Plan. The City Council appointed a General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC) to serve as the primary means of citizen involvement in the formulation of the General Plan and provide recommendations for General Plan goals and policies. Beginning in 2003, the GPAC met regularly to discuss and review the City’s Vision and the General Plan elements.

A BEAUTIFUL DESERT CONTEXT

The City has taken shape in a beautiful valley setting of desert mountains surrounded by dramatic views of the Santa Rosa Mountains to the south and west and the Joshua hills to the north. Lushly landscaped golf course communities and broad arterials on the Coachella Valley floor have created a “garden in the desert.” This contrast of unbridled geography and manicured environments provide Rancho Mirage with its unique sense of place.

The City of Rancho Mirage incorporated on August 3, 1973, bringing autonomy to residents and businesses over land use and development on approximately 15.6 square miles of land. Expansion has occurred without sacrificing the quality of life that originally attracted residents and the City now comprises approximately 15,800 acres or 25 square miles. Its Sphere of Influence (SOI)—County managed lands over which the City has an advisory role—total another nine square miles.





The successful beginning of Rancho Mirage was the establishment of the Clancy Lane and Magnesia Falls area, as well as Thunderbird and Tamarisk Country Clubs in the '40s and '50s. From the beginning, Rancho Mirage was primarily a residential community. Succeeding decades brought new assets and resources. In the '60s commercial business expanded and "Restaurant Row" developed. The '70s saw the introduction of the Eisenhower Medical Center, as well as five of the City's country clubs.

Residential construction boomed throughout the '70s and '80s, and that period also saw the addition of the Valley's world-class destination resorts—Marriott's Rancho Las Palmas, the Westin Mission Hills, and The Lodge. Development in past years has focused along State Highway 111, with the majority of future development expected to be near Interstate 10.

A VISION FOR THE CITY OF RANCHO MIRAGE

The Vision is intended to reflect a positive mental image of the City of Rancho Mirage at a time in the future. It attempts to describe what the City will look like, feel like, and how it would function in the year 2020. Its physical content and image will reflect the values that have prevailed over the years.

The Vision is the first step in the planning process. It provides the foundation for the General Plan. It also should inspire accomplishment and focus energies towards achieving the goals of the City. It will be central to the decision-making processes that will forge the City in years to come.

A Vision for the City of Rancho Mirage

In the year 2020, as it is now, Rancho Mirage will continue to be noted for the quality of its residential neighborhoods. It will continue to be a great place to live or spend leisure time. It will have an international reputation as a destination resort and medical and research center. It will be recognized for its ambience and the unique lifestyle it provides. Residents will enjoy a variety of cultural and recreational opportunities.

Rancho Mirage will be distinctive, with a strong sense of place reflected through the quality of the man-made environment and the natural setting. The City will maintain and protect the backdrop of the Santa Rosa Mountains, and provide public and private open space. The landscape of the City's streets and public areas will present a pleasant, recognizable, citywide theme. It will be the premier location in the Coachella Valley for first class shopping, entertainment, cultural and dining opportunities. Its architecture will be outstanding and appropriate for Rancho Mirage.

New residents of Rancho Mirage will find a variety of neighborhoods and housing types from which to choose.

Future land uses will be designed to be compatible and harmonious with one another. Residential neighborhoods, commercial and business areas, resorts and public places will be pleasing to the eye, well maintained and safe. The street system will also be safe, efficient and attractive; and signage will enhance the character of the City while meeting the needs of local merchants.

The City will continue to be economically prudent and sound. Rancho Mirage will be the prime location in the Coachella Valley to establish new business enterprises

and expand existing operations. Residents and visitors will enjoy attractive, comfortable and safe retail shopping facilities compatible with the low density residential and resort character of the City. Revenue generating businesses will be encouraged to locate and flourish in Rancho Mirage.

USING THE GENERAL PLAN

The Rancho Mirage General Plan, frequently described as the “Constitution” of the City, is the foundation upon which land use decisions are based. The Plan is a comprehensive information and planning guide established by State law to provide a framework for making informed decisions about the future of the community. It identifies the community’s land use, circulation, environmental, economic and social goals and policies as they relate to land use and development. The General Plan identifies concerns and issues important to the community and establishes goals, policies, and program implementation measures that resolve these issues.

General Plan Format

The General Plan is organized into nine elements, as well as an Introduction and Appendix. The seven state-mandated elements—Land Use, Circulation, Housing, Conservation, Open Space, Noise, and Safety—are supplemented by two additional elements which the City considers very important to its future: 1) Community Design and 2) Economic and Fiscal. Within each element is accompanying background information, goals, policies and programs.

An Action-Oriented Plan

To guide a community effectively, a General Plan cannot be a static, vague document; it must be a dynamic, policy guide that gives specific direction to future decisions. It represents the collective goals and values of the City and describes the necessary actions to support them. For Rancho Mirage, this means preserving its best features and taking advantage of new opportunities for quality growth and change.

Goals, Policies, and Programs

Each element contains at least one goal statement and related policy statements and implementing programs.

- ✿ A **goal** in the General Plan is the broadest statement of community values. It is a generalized ideal which provides a sense of direction for action. For example:
 - ♦ *A landscape program that promotes aesthetics, conservation and place-making*
- ✿ The essence of the General Plan is contained within its policy statements. **Policies** further refine the goal statements and provide a clear direction for decision making. Policies include “shall” statements to provide unequivocal directives. Decision making criteria, major development standards and funding priorities are best established by clear General Plan policies. For example:
 - ♦ *Landscape plans submitted to the City shall be consistent with the Community Design Element.*



✿ General Plan *programs* are included as implementation measures needed to carry out related policy statements. Programs provide the basis for scheduling and assigning staff and other resources to specific actions that are needed to implement certain directives of the Plan. For example:

- ♦ *Develop medians and parkways that achieve an interesting visual rhythm through the consistent placement of trees and plant materials.*

Implementation of the General Plan

The Rancho Mirage General Plan relies on element policies and programs, as well as the related mitigation measures set forth in the General Plan Program EIR, to serve as implementation measures. Special studies are also integral tools that assure effective implementation of the General Plan. The City Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances play a critical role in implementing the Plan's goals and policies, while specific plans and development agreements provide detailed implementation programs for specific portions of the City and its Sphere of Influence.

Zoning Ordinance

The Rancho Mirage Zoning Ordinance is the primary tool for implementing the General Plan. While the General Plan is the City's long-term plan for land use development, zoning sets forth the specific development standards, such as lot sizes and permitted land uses, for each parcel in Rancho Mirage. Text, maps, diagrams and other materials describe the distribution and intensity of land uses into such categories as residential, commercial and institutional uses. Written regulations establish minimum development standards for each of the land use zones. Permitting processes set forth in the Zoning Ordinance, including Conditional Use Permits, Variances, and Architectural Reviews guide development to implement the General Plan.

Subdivision Ordinance

Like zoning ordinances, subdivision regulation is another principle instrument for implementing the General Plan. Establishing statewide uniformity in local subdivision procedures, the State Subdivision Map Act (Government Code Sections 66410 et seq.) provides the City with the authority to regulate and control the design and improvement of subdivisions within its boundaries. The Subdivision Map Act also requires findings that, among other things, the subdivision is consistent with the General Plan and any applicable specific plan.

Specific Plans

A specific plan plays an important role as a refinement of the General Plan, applicable to a specific portion of the community. Specific plans often provide detailed analysis of complex projects and indicate precise land use locations and design criteria. Specific plans contain descriptive text, exhibits, and diagrams indicating the distribution, location, and intensity of proposed land uses and the necessary public and private support systems, including streets, utilities, and drainage facilities.

Specific plans also define the standards and criteria by which development and, where applicable, conservation will proceed on the property. Additionally, a specific plan provides a program of implementation measures and financing necessary to carry out the project. It must be consistent with all facets of the General Plan and in turn, zoning, subdivision, and public works projects must be consistent with an existing specific plan.

Specific plans are required for lands designated with the specific plan overlay on the Land Use Plan. Larger complex development proposals may also be required to process a specific plan. Specific plans may be adopted by resolution or ordinance and may be amended as often as deemed necessary by the City Council. Development proposals within areas designated with a specific plan overlay on the General Plan Land Use Plan cannot proceed until a specific plan has been prepared and adopted by the City Council.

In areas where a specific plan encompasses more than one property, the plan must be completed and adopted prior to development on any affected property. Specific plans may be prepared either by the applicant or the City. Should the City prepare a specific plan, it is entitled to reimbursement by affected property owners pursuant to Section 65456 of the California Government Code.

Development Agreements

State law provides for the adoption of development agreements between a project proponent and the City, in accordance with Government Code Section 65865. The purpose of development agreements is to provide developers with additional assurances that development approvals will not be nullified by some future local policy or regulation change. In exchange, the developer may be required to meet certain conditions or performance criteria which become part of the agreement.

Development agreements can be a useful means of meeting General Plan goals and policies, while removing some of the risks faced by developers. Agreements can remain in effect for a few or several years, the term typically being set forth in the agreement. It is important to emphasize that, as set forth in Government Code Section 65866, the City, unless otherwise provided by the development agreement, is not prevented from applying new rules, regulations, and policies to the property.

Commissions and Committees

The City is also empowered to establish advisory commissions or committees, which may be comprised of public officials as well as private individuals, to review and make recommendations on policies or programs facilitating implementation of the General Plan. These commissions typically address such issue areas as parks and recreation, trails, libraries, public safety, community and architectural design, affordable housing and emergency preparedness. The City Council may establish commissions or committees to address specific and focused issues or to provide recommendations on an on-going basis. The Council may perpetuate or dissolve these commissions or committees as it sees fit.



Consistency with the General Plan

Proposals for development, either developer or City initiated, must be analyzed and tested for consistency with the goals, policies, and programs in every applicable element of the General Plan. This test of compliance is also a required criterion for determining significant impacts under the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Charter City Status

Under the California constitution, cities are either general law cities or charter cities. General law cities must follow procedures set by State law and may only exercise powers granted to them by the State. Charter cities have full authority over their own municipal affairs (such as financing public improvements or enacting local ordinances), although they remain subject to State law on matters of statewide importance (such as regulation of traffic and vehicles or exercising powers of eminent domain).

The City of Rancho Mirage became a charter city in 1997. The City therefore is able to exercise broader powers to enact land use regulations than do general law cities. For example, as a charter city, Rancho Mirage is not currently required to meet the State law requirement for consistency between the general plan and the zoning ordinance. Additionally, Rancho Mirage is not required to submit annual reports to the State on the status and implementation of its general plan. Rancho Mirage's status as a charter city provides it with greater control over its future development and administration.

CEQA Review of Consistency

State CEQA Guidelines require that an initial study include "an examination of whether the project is compatible with existing zoning and plans." The State CEQA Guidelines further stipulate that, "A project will normally have a significant effect on the environment if it will conflict with adopted environmental plans and goals of the community where it is located." If a determination is made by the Planning Commission or the City Council that the proposed action is inconsistent with the General Plan, no further action shall be taken without the completion and processing of an EIR or other detailed analysis which would support a finding of overriding consideration.

Capital Improvement Programs

Rancho Mirage must also annually review its capital improvement program, as well as local public works projects of other local agencies, for consistency with the City's General Plan. Also, pursuant to Government Code Section 65401, all City departments and all other agencies whose jurisdiction falls within the City (such as a school district) must submit a list of proposed projects to the City. The City is responsible for reviewing these projects for conformity with the General Plan.

AMENDING THE GENERAL PLAN

The General Plan is not static, but rather is a dynamic and multi-faceted document that defines and addresses the changing needs of the City. It is based on an on-going assessment and understanding of existing and projected community needs. To assure that the General Plan is kept current, short-term programs and policies may be reviewed periodically to reflect compatibility with budgetary priorities and related program status. Long-term

programs and implementation measures must also be given consideration to assure timely funding and development of critical infrastructure and public services and facilities.

Timing

Mandatory elements of the General Plan may be amended up to four times in each calendar year. The City Council or any citizen may initiate a General Plan Amendment. It is left to the discretion of the local jurisdiction to establish an amendment schedule to be published one year in advance. State law further requires that the Housing Element be reviewed and updated at least once every five years.

Application Procedures

Applications for the amendment of the General Plan and the appropriate fees are filed with the City Community Development Department. An amendment to the General Plan constitutes a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and, therefore, is evaluated for its environmental effects and consistency with other elements of the General Plan. Final approval of General Plan amendments is the responsibility of the City Council subject to satisfying the environmental requirements imposed by CEQA.

Exemptions

The State Legislature has recognized that occasions arise which require the local jurisdiction to have some flexibility in amending the General Plan. As set forth in the California Government Code, the following are exempt from the General Plan amendment schedule.

- ✿ Amendments to optional elements.
- ✿ Amendments requested and necessary for the development of a residential project, of which at least 25% of its units will be available to persons of low or moderate income (Section 65358(c)).
- ✿ Any amendment necessary to comply with a court decision in a case involving the legal adequacy of the general plan (Section 65358(d)(1)).
- ✿ Amendments to bring a general plan into compliance with an airport land use plan (Section 65302.3).

GOALS, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

The effective implementation of the General Plan relies on the development and maintenance of City regulatory documents, including the Zoning Ordinance, specific plan requirements, the Subdivision Ordinance, and City rules for the implementation of CEQA. The General Plan itself is a living document with mandates for frequent review and refinement. Amendments to the Plan should be given careful consideration and not be granted casually. The goal, policies, and programs in this introductory chapter will help assure the effective administration and implementation of all elements of the Rancho Mirage General Plan.

GOAL 1

Comprehensive and integrated administration and implementation of all elements of the Rancho Mirage General Plan through consistent and effective policies and programs.





Policy 1

The City shall provide for the periodic revision and updating of the General Plan and ensure that associated City ordinances, including the Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances, are maintained in conformance with the General Plan.

Policy 2

The City shall examine and review, on an on-going basis, the long-term implications of General Plan policies and programs as they relate to the City's ability to provide public services and facilities.

Program 2.A

Conduct a periodic review of the General Plan, which includes a report on inter-relationships, impacts or enhancements of the General Plan with regard to the City's ability to fund and provide public services and facilities.

Policy 3

The City shall ensure that properly filed development applications are processed in an expeditious and timely manner.

Program 3.A

Maintain application processing procedures that assure expeditious and timely processing of land development applications, including "fast tracking" procedures for priority proposals.

Policy 4

The City shall utilize master facility plans to address the City's recreation, drainage/flood control, infrastructure, utility management, traffic control, and other facility needs. Master plans should include plans for funding and schedules for phased implementation, which shall be incorporated into the City's capital improvement programs.

Policy 5

The City shall provide opportunities for review and comment on development proposals through public hearing notices sent to owners of property located at least within 500 feet of the development proposal site.

Policy 6

City projects shall comply with the same policies, procedures and regulations required of the private sector.